

Reduce Stress. Live Healthier. Part 3

This is the TD Fitness podcast with Coach T, episode number 102.

Welcome to the TD Fitness podcast, giving you ways to live a healthy lifestyle without giving up the things that make life worth living. Now your host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

Hey guys, this is Coach T. Welcome back to episode number 103 of the TD Fitness podcast. We are continuing with the theme of reducing stress to live healthier. In fact, this is part three of my four part series on that topic. Really, as we look at this episode and this part of the topic, we're going to cover three broad areas. One is a healthier living mindset. Another is a way to create healthier habits, and then ultimately practicing healthier habits, because that's where the rubber meets the road, right? But it starts with a healthier living mindset. This is a compilation of the fit vids that I've produced over the last month or so. When it comes to having a healthier living mindset, there are three areas that we cover.

The first is this notion of being patient, because part of the difficulty lies not just in taking action, but rather in waiting for the result that you're hoping for. So, you have to take the long view and have that patient mindset in order to be less stressed over time. Secondly, we talk about how perfect is the enemy of better. Your healthier habits don't have to be perfect. They just need to be a little bit better than they are right now. Then I also talk about how we need to focus on action and not just results. So, your goal should be take action, not necessarily to achieve a result, because consistent action is in fact a result. Those are some of the things that we talk about with a healthier living mindset in this episode.

Then as we go on to create healthier habits, we provide a simple statement that will accomplish essentially the same thing as a SMART goal, if you're familiar with that acronym. I'll go into that in this episode too, and then talk a little bit about how to sustain healthier

habits as you create them. They have to be both realistic and they have to be appealing. So, I talk about that here. Then finally, under practicing healthy habits, we address how time is a resource. It's just like money. If you can save a little bit of time by letting go of something, then you could free up or create less stress in your life and therefore live healthier. You also have to prioritize your time. Specifically, you have to prioritize what you won't do so that you can free up some time for yourself.

Then we conclude this episode with a time-based approach to practicing healthier habits. So, as you look to practice healthier habits that can lead to reduce stress, it's important to choose an approach based on the amount of time that you currently have available, because that ultimately is going to determine how you need to proceed as you move forward. Those are some of the highlights from this episode. I hope that you find these beneficial. I hope that you enjoy listening, and I hope that it proves useful for you as you look to reduce stress to live healthier. With that, here are the fit vids from the previous month.

When it comes to living healthier, part of the difficulty lies not in simply taking action, but rather in taking action again and again over time. It's in being consistent. The other difficult part is in waiting for the result that you're hoping for. It's in being patient. I'll address the consistency piece in the next post, but we'll talk about patience here today. The more I revisit and think about this, the more I realize that our expectations for what we seek, what we want to achieve, are becoming more and more short term as a society. It's the, "I want what I want, and I want it now," type of mindset. The problem is that when it comes to healthier living, that short-term mindset just doesn't work. Your body doesn't change overnight. But the good news is that your mindset can change overnight and your approach can change overnight, and your expectations can as well.

When you take the long view, the expectation is no longer that you'll see the result right away. You have a forward-thinking mindset, one that understands that consistency will get you there, but that patience is required. One good night of sleep isn't going to remove all of the stress in your life, but consistency in getting more rest will make you an overall

healthier person. The same is true with removing things from your calendar to free up some white space. Take the long view. Have a patient mindset. You'll not only feel less stressed, but you'll set the expectation of long-term growth from within.

In the last post, I stated that part of the difficulty in living a healthier life isn't just in performing healthier actions, but it's in doing it over and over again and being consistent. Well, one way to get that consistency is to refine your goal to make it either a little less frequent or a little less difficult, or both. This kind of goes against our, "I have to live perfect to be healthy," mindset. So, I'm asking you to change your mindset to better, not perfect. I'm not asking you to get eight hours of sleep every night, but how about 20 more minutes on three nights a week? I'm not asking you to give up one of the extracurricular activities that you love, but how about taking a look at all of the things that you do and the things that you're involved in and prioritizing them to get a few minutes of white space back on your calendar?

Your healthier habits don't have to be perfect. They just need to be a little bit better than they are right now. They don't have to be every day, just more often than you're doing them right now. By taking that better, not perfect approach, you'll find that it's a lot easier to be consistent with your habit. Once you get that consistency, then you can look to make your habits even better or a little more frequent. Your goal should be to take action. It shouldn't necessarily be to achieve a result, because consistent action is a result. Something that you can control to reduce stress is the amount of sleep, rest, or recovery that you get. You control how busy you are by saying no to things and gaining some time back in your schedule. You can't control the outcomes, but you can likely predict them.

For example, I know that if I continue to get minimal amounts of sleep and rest, that I'm more likely to get sick, to be less alert at work, to be drained when my kids want to play, and the converse is also true. The more rest I get, the more likely it is that I'll be alert and healthy and energetic. So, the challenge is, number one, that the results that we tend to see first are hard to tangibly measure, which means we may not actually notice them at all. Some

examples are feeling better and feeling less stress. We really don't notice those things right away way. Then number two, those easily measurable results may not come, or they may not come as quickly as you expect, at least. The example here is obviously weight loss. Focus on the actions that you take, not the result that you seek. Your actions are the result that we're looking for. It means you're living a healthier life, and isn't that what you want? Because that's what you can control.

All right, guys, you may be familiar with a way of defining goals using the SMART acronym, which stands for specific, measurable, action oriented, or attainable, relevant or realistic, and we'll hit that in the next clip, and time-bound. That is not a bad way to go about creating healthier habits. Creating healthier habits is the healthy living principle for this week. The way that I teach this and the way my action takers, the monthly members, those solving their problems and taking action for the better, the way that they're doing this is by focusing on one simple sentence for each habit that they want to improve. That sentence is this. "I will," insert the statement or the action that you can control, "And I will do it X number of times a week," for example, for three weeks this month.

Let me repeat that. "I will," whatever action you choose, "And I will do it," however many times you choose, "This week, and then for three weeks this month." The format includes the key parts of a SMART goal, but it puts them in an action oriented direction. So, with a goal to manage or reduce stress in your life, for example, you might say, "I will go to bed 30 minutes earlier on three nights this week," or, "I will free up an hour on my schedule on two days this week." In these examples, your approach is action-oriented by saying, "I will," they name a specific action that you have control over. They're both specific and measurable, and they're sustainable. That's the piece that gets overlooked from time to time. We'll talk about sustainable habits in the next couple of posts.

All right, you've heard me say that consistency is key. Well, the way to stay consistent is to make your habits sustainable. A sustainable habit is both realistic and appealing. Let's address realistic habits here, and we'll hit sustainability in the next post. How do we make

habits realistic? Well, realistic is different for everyone. Going back to the concept of making your habits work for you, which we talked about last week and the week before, your habits need to be realistic for you. Don't say you're going to get seven-and-a-half hours of sleep every night if you're nowhere close to that now, right? Be realistic about what you can change. How gradually can you do it while making it challenging enough to actually be a goal?

"I will go to bed 30 minutes earlier on three nights this week. I will free up an hour on my schedule on two days this week." Are those realistic for you? If not, how can you make them more realistic while making improvements to your current sleep and schedule habits? This is an approach you can use to reduce some of the stress in your life, which is the theme over these past few weeks. Consistent habits are sustainable, and sustainable habits have to be appealing. If you don't want to do something, you probably won't, and there's no getting around that. How do I make myself want to have a healthier habit that I don't currently have?

Well, many times we actually grow to enjoy, or at least not mind the habits that are good for us. Are you excited about brushing your teeth every day? Probably not. But it's a habit, right? Are you excited about taking a shower every day? Well, sometimes you might be, but it's a habit that you grow to enjoy from time to time. Habits become habits because we do them over and over again. It starts with us doing something, and it remains a habit because we keep doing it. The point is that it takes action on your part, but that brings us back around to the question, how do I initiate an action that I don't necessarily enjoy to begin with?

Well, how about if I ask you to initiate an action that you don't necessarily despise instead. It's a different way to look at it. I'll give you a little example here. When my daughter was three years old, she did not like vegetables. I assume that's the same for most three-year-olds. But we made it more appealing to her by giving her small spoonful of vegetables on her plate, not enough to pitch a fit over, but enough to start a habit. Now she doesn't mind as much when there's a normal kid sized portion of veggies with the rest of the dinner on her plate, because we gradually stepped it up. It's normal now. It's a habit. So, maybe your

"spoonful of veggies" is to add a few more minutes of sleep to your schedule a few times during the week, or maybe it's to free up a few minutes on your calendar, because each of these, as I've said before, will help you reduce the amount of stress in your life, which again is the theme for this series. Before you know it, those actions will be normal, and that is how habits start.

All right. So, as we look at ways to practice healthier habits, specifically to reduce stress in our lives, I'd like to hit the topic of sunk costs. Now, you may be wondering how previous investments related to health and our decisions moving forward. But consider this. Time is a resource, just like money. The same thing that prevent us from making objective decisions about our money can affect our decisions on how we spend our time as well. The same reasons why it's hard to walk away from the blackjack table when you're down a few bucks, or to get rid of that stock that you've invested in, or the fixer upper automobile that you've poured money into to get working again, those are reasons carry over into the time and effort that we've invested in other things as well.

Earlier in this series, I've pointed out how we need to take a hard look at the things that occupy our time and determine where we can free up or add some white space. My question for you is this. What extra activities are you doing right now that you may not feel cause you extra stress, but that you just continue to do because you're used to it or because that's what you've done for a long time? Are you the treasurer for your son's preschool because you feel like no one else will do it? Do you still do things for your six year old that she could do for herself? Have you taken on an extra volunteer role at work? Your time is a resource, just like your money is, so be careful where you spend it. If you can save a little time by letting go of something, you may feel less stress, and therefore be able to live a little bit but healthier.

In my last post, I talked about freeing up some time to reduce stress. Well, one thing that can help with this is actually deciding what's the most important thing to you, or what are the most important things in your life. Essentially, it's prioritizing. But the part we often

miss with prioritizing is not necessarily highlighting what we're going to do, but rather, it's deciding what we're not going to do. If you have to prioritize extra work right now, then what are you willing to temporarily let go of? If this is a critical time in your kids' adolescents, then what can you let go of to free up some time to address that?

Too many times, we just continue to add more and more to our schedules. Before you know it, you're booked solid all day with no time for the most important person, which is you. The reason I say that you're the most important person is because you can't effectively take care of others unless you're taking care of yourself. Self care is important, so put your own mask on first, right? What will you prioritize? More importantly, what will you not do so that you can free up some time for yourself? All right, as we wrap up this week's theme of practicing healthier habits that can lead to reduce stress, it's important to choose the right approach for your current situation.

Now, generally speaking, I think most of us fall into probably one of three categories with respect to the amount of time that we have available. Either you have a little bit of extra time that you're looking to maximize, or you feel like you can legitimately make some time as you look at your schedule, or you just don't have any extra time to spare at all. Here's what I'd offer. If you have some extra time right now, I encourage you to add some stress reducing activities, such as exercise or meditation, or yoga or stretching, or just reading. Inserting that white space is important. These types of things can create a calming effect. You don't need an hour. Just use whatever small bits of time that you have available.

Now, if you feel like you can prioritize a few things and make some time in your schedule, you can either add activities like those I've just mentioned, or try to add a little more sleep to your nighttime routine. That rest and recovery goes such a long way in the effort to reduce overall stress in our lives. Then finally, if you're flat out out of time and you can't fit anything else on your plate, then look to get some of that time back by cutting back on what you do, the amount that you work, or the things that you're involved in. Being over

committed causes stress, so choose an approach to reducing stress based on the amount of time that you currently have available.

All right. That's it, guys. Thanks again so much for tuning into this episode, episode number 103. I hope that the content here has helped in some way to help you to reduce stress and live a healthier life. It is so important that we are able to do this, because a lot of times we just underestimate the effect that stress has on our lives when it comes to healthier living, when it comes to losing weight, when it comes to practicing some of those habits that we've been trying to incorporate for so long. That's all I have for you today. With that, take care. Have a blessed one.

Coach T out!